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CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

Letter dated 26 February 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

I have the honour to transmit herewith the press release of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC)-European Union (EU) Joint Forum, which was held in Istanbul on 12 and 13 February 2002.

The Joint Forum in which 46 OIC member and observer States, and 28 EU member and candidate States participated, was organized at the initiative of Turkey with the theme "Civilization and harmony: the political dimension". Fifty-one of the participating States were represented at the foreign ministerial level.

The tragedy of 11 September 2001 has illustrated the vulnerability of the understanding among different cultures and civilizations, and has demonstrated how easy it is for deep-rooted prejudices to surface. It was witnessed that one of the first temptations after 11 September was to identify terrorism along cultural and religious lines. Therefore, the Forum, which confirmed its belief in the harmony among civilizations and which underlined that cultures in their diversity complement and enhance one another, was indeed considered a timely initiative by all the participants.

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The Forum provided the opportunity for the OIC and EU to reiterate their joint responsibility, as well as their willingness, to contribute to the quest for a better understanding among different cultures and civilizations. We believe that the positive atmosphere yielded by the Forum can also make an important contribution to the work of the Commission on Human Rights.

I would therefore appreciate it if you would have the text of my letter and the enclosed OIC-EU Joint Forum press release* circulated as an official document of the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on Human Rights under item 11 of the provisional agenda.

(Signed) Murat SUNGAR
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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* Reproduced as received, in the original language only.

Annex

OIC-EU Joint Forum

13 February 2002

PRESS RELEASE

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the OIC Member and Observer Countries and the EU Member and Candidate Countries came together, on 12-13 February 2002, for a Joint Forum in Istanbul at the invitation of the Foreign Minister of Turkey, to share their assessments of the world's present political situation and to promote understanding and harmony among civilizations.

History has taught us that the lack of mutual knowledge and respect among civilizations can greatly affect world stability and peace. Harmony and welfare are nurtured when different peoples make communication a priority, taking the time to express and listen to each other's views and interests, acknowledging and tolerating differences, while at the same time seeking out commonalities that can help build strong relationships that promote political and economic cooperation.

The tragic events of September 11th and their repercussions have shown the need to strengthen tolerance and understanding among different cultures to avoid reappearance of deeply rooted prejudices that can surface. The horrifying attacks of September 11th are purely brutal acts of terrorism and they cannot be explained or justified for religious, cultural or any other reasons whatsoever. On the other hand, September 11th has also sparked a growing consciousness of the need for all sides to discuss and attempt to better understand the differences in perceptions, values and interests, as well as to promote tolerance and appreciation for cultural diversity among them. We jointly have a responsibility to address and resolve issues which can lead to divisions within and between our communities, to embrace and value our diversities, and to promote and uphold the values we all share.

During its deliberations, the OIC-EU Joint Forum has acknowledged the various activities, resolutions, recommendations and reports of international and regional organizations, such as the UN and the UNESCO, the OIC, the EU, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, the Arab League, the Organization of African Unity and other fora as the Barcelona Process, including the Global Agenda on Dialogue Among Civilizations adopted by the UN General Assembly on 21 November 2001, which are designed to protect and improve the common heritage of mankind and the shared values of different cultures, and to enhance tolerance, dialogue and cooperation within and among nations and peoples.

In the course of discussions the following points were agreed upon:

- The Forum reaffirms its strong belief that cultures, in their diversity, complement and

enhance one another. The Forum also confirms its belief in the harmony among civilizations and in its attainability.

- The main means to support coherence and solidarity and to avoid racial, religious and cultural prejudices is to enhance our knowledge of one another through communication and cooperation for the promotion of common universal values, such as those enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other relevant international human rights instruments. To this end the two political organizations, the EU and the OIC have a joint responsibility to contribute to the achievements of these goals.

- The Forum affirms that terrorism cannot be justified for any reason whatsoever. It recognizes the joint responsibility to fight terrorism in all its forms and manifestations within the framework of the UN, in conformity with its Charter and its resolutions.

- The OIC and EU countries are committed to defining problems emerging from cultural prejudices and political and economic injustices and to promoting solutions that will contribute to universal peace, welfare and stability.

- The Forum underlined that for peace, stability and harmony to prevail , the Middle East conflict must be settled in a just and comprehensive manner and in accordance with international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions. In this context, the "two state" solution will contribute to bring peace and security to the peoples concerned.

- The OIC-EU Forum, having listened to the exchange of ideas and to participants' views, has concluded that there is a need for further cooperation. The Forum proposes that existing bilateral and multilateral frameworks continue to be used for general debate on the issues raised during this meeting.

- The Forum noted with appreciation the invitation of His Highness the Emir of the State of Qatar in his capacity as current Chairman of the OIC to host a OIC-EU Troika meeting in the second half of the current year, in Doha.

The Forum thanked the Government of Turkey for the initiative and effort in organizing this Forum that constituted an event of great political significance. They welcomed Turkey's intention to publish the *compte rendu* of the OIC-EU Joint Forum and its readiness to facilitate communication among the participating countries and organizations if the need arises.

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